

## “Healing the Wounds of War”

El Paso VA  
Health Care System  
Volume 6, Issue 4



The Department of Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service (VAVS) was founded in 1946 to provide for our nation's veterans while they are cared for by VA health care facilities. It is the largest centralized volunteer program in the Federal government. Over 350 organizations support VAVS. Volunteers have provided over 508 million hours of service since the program began. Were it not for the volunteers throughout the VA, many “added value” services provided to our veterans would not exist.

VAVS programs throughout the nation partner with local community and veteran organizations to assist VA facilities in meeting the needs of veterans. Community and veteran organization volunteers have a strong desire to serve others. They play an important role in providing for the needs of our nation's veterans.

During fiscal year 2002, volunteers at the El Paso VA Health Care System (VAHCS), provided over 37,000 hours of volunteer service. Our Voluntary Service works closely with 25 veteran service organizations in serving our veterans. The VA Voluntary Service Executive Committee oversees the El Paso program. The committee provides oversight for volunteer placement, programs for veterans, and fundraising to support all programs.

Volunteers can be found in many departments within the Health Care Center such as the Central Records Unit,

primary care teams, escort and information, Behavioral Health Service, prosthetics, and many more.

Four extremely popular programs at the Health Care Center are run entirely by volunteers:

**Refreshment Program:** Veteran service organizations provide light refreshments to veterans every day.

**Escort Management Program:** Volunteers are some of the first people a veteran will see when arriving at the Health Care Center. Escort volunteers are a wealth of information concerning the location of clinics and the services provided by our facility. They also check out wheelchairs to veterans and, if needed, wheel the patient to their appointments.

**Appointment Ambassador Program:** Volunteers call veterans everyday who have upcoming appointments in primary care, optometry, cardiology, women's health, coumadin, dermatology, and infectious disease. The veterans appreciate the calls as it helps them remember their appointments.

**Book and Magazine Program:** Every patient waiting area in the Health Care Center is stocked with books and

magazines. These provide veterans with activities to occupy them while waiting to see their doctor.

Volunteers provide their much needed time and talents to give back to our veterans for their gift of service to our nation. They arrive to work each day with a big smile, an open heart and a listening ear. They come because they care. They come to make a difference. Their caring attitudes make all the difference in the world.



**There are many opportunities for individuals and organizations to volunteer at our medical facility. For further information, please call Ms. Monti Walthall, Voluntary Service Officer at 564-7882.**

# VIKES

## Painful Mouth Sores!

If you suffer from repetitive bouts with canker sores or fever blisters, you know how irritating and unsightly they can be! While often confused with each other, these ailments have very different causes, symptoms, and treatments.

A **canker sore** is a round white spot inside the mouth that causes a burning sensation for several days. Some researchers believe acidic foods like citrus fruits or tomatoes cause them, while other studies indicate stress is the culprit.

Canker sores are either simple or complex. The *simple* variety appears 3-4 times a year and lasts several days to a week. *Complex* cankers are less common but more persistent because old ones heal and are quickly replaced by new ones. While there is no cure, you can alleviate symptoms by avoiding acidic or spicy foods, applying ice, and using over the counter mouth rinses and pain relievers. Contact your physician if you have a high fever or if sores last longer than one week.

**Fever blisters** appear on the mouth, lips, nose, or cheeks. They are caused by Herpes Simplex Virus Type 1. Someone experiencing an active outbreak can spread the infection to others by sharing silverware, razors, or towels, as well as by direct skin contact.

Several weeks after exposure, you might feel pain or tingling at the infection site for a few days, followed by a small, fluid-filled blister on a raised, red painful area of skin. Symptoms last 7-10 days and reappear occasionally – usually near the original site. Fever blisters typically clear up without treatment, but prescription drugs may help prevent frequent bouts.

During an outbreak, wash hands frequently and avoid touching other people. Infections spreading to the eye can cause blindness, so call your doctor immediately if you experience burning pain or rash in or near the eye.

## 'Tis the Season for Stress

Seasonal celebrations, particularly Thanksgiving and Christmas, are extremely stressful for many people. Try these tips for keeping your holiday spirits bright.

**1 Bury the hatchet.** Divorced spouses wreak havoc with scheduling. Don't refuse invitations because your ex is on the guest list and don't make your children feel guilty for celebrating at your ex's home instead of yours.

**2 Celebrate life.** Holidays are difficult after losing someone special. When you feel sad, write in a journal about funny or touching incidents involving your loved one.

**3 Spend realistically.** Dad was right when he said money doesn't grow on trees, so set spending limits and stick to them.

**4 Forget shopping.** Do you fret about choosing the right gift? Do you worry about spending too much or too little? No time to schedule shopping trips? Gift certificates are actually a thoughtful choice, since they always fit and are always the right color.

**5 Act like a kid.** Take a hint from youngsters: drink hot cocoa, go caroling, surprise someone under mistletoe or hang a stocking for yourself.

**6 Plan ahead.** Making travel plans well in advance can save money and frustration. Allow time for unexpected delays, and make certain someone knows your travel route if you'll be driving.

**7 Spend time alone.** Don't feel obligated to accept every invitation, and allow time for non-holiday related activities you enjoy.

**8 Avoid alcohol.** Never drink and drive, and don't let your friends or guests do it either.

**9 Awaken your spirit.** Year-end holidays are a perfect time to nurture your spiritual beliefs by worshiping at the church or synagogue of your choice.

**10 Lend a hand.** Donating time or money to others that are less fortunate keeps your life in perspective. Besides, it just feels good.



# Healthy Relationships = Healthy YOU!

From the moment you were born, you began developing relationships. Family members, school buddies, coworkers, a spouse – particularly the people in your life now – are important to your physical health!

Consider retired widow Jane, who spends many Saturdays taking her great-grandchildren to the zoo, the library, or the movies. She attends church regularly, a gardening club meeting quarterly, and meets with other retired teachers for breakfast once a month. Jane also volunteers as needs helping prepare and serve meals for underprivileged families.

Divorced Robert, on the other hand, is lonely despite his full-time job. His children live nearby, but he rarely talks to them or invites them over. He isn't affiliated with a particular faith. Many long-time friends from work have retired, and Robert isn't comfortable asking current coworkers to play golf, something he frequently did years ago. He spends nights and weekends alone, only chatting occasionally with neighbors.

How do Jane's friendships and close family bonds impact her health?

- The simple act of communicating with others by telephone, email, traditional letters, or in person keeps her mentally sharp and positively affects her physical well-being.
- Sharing life's joy and sorrows with others keeps her emotionally connected and less prone to depression.
- Continued contact with like-minded individuals makes Jane more likely to engage in healthy activities. At sixty years old, she and a gardening friend gave up smoking, something she hadn't been able to do on her own.
- Knowing that people depend on her is motivation enough to stay in shape and keep regular doctor's appointments.

If you are more like Robert than like Jane, spend time making new friends and cultivating relationships. Your health depends on it!

## Healthy Strategies: Coping With Stress

Stuck in traffic on your way to work? Disagreeing with your spouse over how to spend your paycheck? Grandkids refusing to mind? Undoubtedly, incidents like these are stressful. Did you know that how you handle them affects your health?

Shouting at passing motorists, cursing at your loved one, or spanking your grandchildren are inappropriate reactions that actually cause your heart to race, blood pressure to rise, and muscles to get tight. People who become enraged in such situations are often in a state of continual stress, which can cause fatigue, insomnia and depression. This ongoing state of anxiety compromises your body's immune system, making you vulnerable to high blood pressure, headaches, ulcers, chest pain, sexual dysfunction and other ailments.

Your attitude changes with ongoing stress, too. Otherwise happy people can become resentful, irritable, and have difficulty concentrating.

To keep stress from affecting your health, change

the situation that is causing it or change your reaction to it. For example, if extended delays on the highway are common on a route you must use, purchase a humorous audio book for your CD player. If disagreements about money are common at your house, consult a financial advisor. If youngsters always seem unruly, they are probably bored. Take them a nearby discount store and let them choose board games, then sit down and play with them.

If major life events such as divorce or the death of a loved one cause you stress, ask your doctor to suggest lifestyle changes or medication that can lighten the load. For some people, simply eliminating caffeine and alcohol improves their outlook. Other popular methods of coping with stress include meditation or yoga, exercise or massage.

Life is unpredictable, but it doesn't have to be unnerving. Change what you can, and develop healthy coping strategies for the rest!

# VA Center Develops Tools to Improve Patient Safety

A fall can be a life-changing event for an elderly person. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention reports that about 40 percent of all nursing home admissions are as a result of a fall. For people older than 65, falls are the leading causes of injury deaths.

VA Tampa has become a leader in the field of fall prevention. They have opened a Patient Safety Center where doctors, nurses, therapists, researchers, consultants and biomechanical engineers are developing tools to help elderly people avoid accidents.

At the Tampa Patient Safety Center they use a 200-pound mannequin named Eric to test equipment for bed-ridden patients, prevent bedsores, and determine how to prevent injuries to staff. A computer-controlled balance machine helps determine where patients first get into trouble and helps the therapist design exercises for improving balance.

The VA has funded three other centers nationally, in Cincinnati, Boston and Palo Alto. The advances in equipment and fall prevention that are developed at these centers are shared with VA medical centers across the country to improve patient care and safety. VA is a leader in patient safety and some of the ideas in the Tampa center are expected to become the standard in the health care industry.

## Sharing of *Health Trends* Articles Encouraged

We encourage readers to reprint and distribute articles (or excerpts of articles) from any issue of *Health Trends*, with acknowledgement given to this publication. In addition, we encourage groups with Web sites (such as veterans service organizations) to link to our site at <http://www.va.gov/visn18>

*Please notify us about any reprints or distribution by writing to:*

**Public Affairs Officer  
Carl T. Hayden VA Medical Center  
650 E Indian School Road  
Phoenix, AZ 85012-1892**

**Visit our new website to get information on health and medication questions at:  
[http://www.va.gov/visn18/HI/Health\\_informatics.htm](http://www.va.gov/visn18/HI/Health_informatics.htm)**

**Winter 2002**  
*Health Trends* is published as an educational service by the Department of Veterans Affairs Southwest Network, VISN 18.  
For patient concerns or issues, contact our telephone linked care line at (915) 564-6158 or 1-800-672-3782.  
For newsletter information, contact:  
Public Affairs Officer  
El Paso VA Health Care System  
5001 N. Piedras St. • El Paso, TX 79930-4211  
(915) 564-6100  
**Why You Should Quit Smoking**  
<http://www.va.gov/visn18/News/smoking.htm>  
If you are a veteran, please call (915) 564-6159 for information on smoking cessation classes.  
Information in *Health Trends* comes from a wide range of medical experts. If you have any concerns about specific content that may affect your health, please contact your health care provider.  
Models may be used in photos and illustrations.  
©2002 Schatz Publishing Group

Presorted Standard  
U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
St. Louis, MO  
Permit No. 5319

El Paso VA Health Care System  
5001 N. Piedras St.  
El Paso, TX 79930